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ABSTRACT

A teacher peer evaluation program that was implemented in Dade County, Florida, schools is described in this paper, with attention given to the extent of staff acceptance. Implemented under the school system's school-based management pilot program in 1987, the program trained experienced teachers to observe their peers' teaching behaviors using the district's official evaluation instrument. To measure the extent of teacher acceptance, this study examined three factors: staff attitudes toward the program; teacher rapport; and student achievement. Data were derived from analysis of records of participation and interviews with lead teachers and principals. Outcomes included a general improvement in staff attitudes and rapport; however, impact of student achievement was mixed. Teachers continue to conduct formal observations in schools that implemented the program 5 years ago, but the program has foundered in two schools with collegial coaching. Two figures are included. (5 references) (LMI)

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PEER EVALUATION AMONG TEACHERS: ACCEPTANCE OF ALTERNATIVE ROLES

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes peer evaluation among teachers in Dade County and examines the extent to which it was accepted by the staff at schools where it was implemented. In most cases "Peer evaluation" involved experienced teachers carrying out formal classroom observations after being trained in the administrative observation system. It has been argued that teachers may not be accepted by their peers as they attempt to take on roles not traditionally assigned them, but it appears that in this case the new roles were acceptable. Teachers are continuing to carry out formal observations in the schools where such a program was implemented five years ago; in two schools with collegial coaching, the program has foundered.

Peer Evaluation Among Teachers: Acceptance of Alternative Roles

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Peer evaluation among teachers was implemented at certain schools in Dade County under the system's School–Based Management pilot program in 1987. The program involved trained teachers observing the teaching behavior of peers using the district's official instrument. Like many innovations of this nature, peer evaluation is an attempt to broaden the professional involvement of teachers at the same time as it makes more use of teacher expertise. The argument is made that teachers, being closer to the classroom themselves, may have a more informed perspective on the teaching practices of their peers, and will also very likely benefit themselves from observations of peers. However, it is also argued that perhaps teachers are unprepared to accept teachers in roles traditionally carried out only by administrators (Smylie & Denny, 1990).

This paper describes the form that peer evaluation took in Dade County and the extent to which it became institutionalized at participating schools. In the sections that follow, I outline the context of the peer evaluation innovation as a prime example of the second wave of educational reforms that were initiated during the 1980s. Next, I describe the historical context of the Dade County peer evaluation program and detail the policy under which it was implemented. I then discuss the various ways in which it was implemented and the patterns of participation that unfolded under the different interpretations of the program. The extent of acceptance is measured through the use of records of participation and interviews with principals and lead teachers. I conclude with discussion of reasons for the program's persistence.

Peer Evaluation and the Reforms of the 1980s

Murphy (1990) has described multiple waves of educational reform that arose in the United States during the 1980s. The first wave, characterized by directives to improve and tighten the standards under the existing system, emerged from or was contemporary with early reform reports, most notably *A Nation at Risk*. The second wave, described as a demand to reconceive the basic structure of schooling, emerged in responses to first wave reports (such as those of the Holmes group and Sizer's *Horace's Compromise*) that reacted to deficiencies attributed to the initial wave. The third wave, perceived as an attempt to broaden the basic purpose of education to encompass the multiple needs of children, appears also to have emerged from critiques of the preceding wave's objectives.

According to Murphy, a feature that distinguishes the 80s reform waves from earlier reform movements is the casting of "'teachers as professional decision makers and not as technicians'. . . as the solution rather than the problem" (quoted in Murphy, 1990, p. 7).

This feature, which "has been especially true of the second wave of the current reform era," (*Ibid.*) was manifested in teacher involvement in and responsibility for activities that have traditionally fallen in the administrative arena. This aspect of the movement has resulted in a need to rethink the sharing of authority among professionals at all levels of education (Murphy, 1990, p. 45).

Leadership Roles for Teachers

In expanding on the characteristics of the second wave that relate to teachers, Smylie and Denny (1990) describe an emphasis on leadership roles. They argue, however, that nationally little has been done to provide an environment that would enable these efforts to succeed. Although the new teacher/leaders receive training, little thought is given to preparing teachers in the school as a whole to accept and work with teachers in these new roles. Instead, it is assumed that the new roles will be automatically accepted. Perhaps this is not surprising in view of the fact that little research in education has dealt with how teachers take on new roles and how they are received by their peers as they carry out new responsibilities.

Nevertheless, social norms, such as "equality, autonomy, and privacy," which have been found to characterize the teaching profession (Smylie and Denny, 1990, p.253) may prevent the long–term acceptance of new professional roles for teachers. Therefore, the question persists as to the extent to which wave two programs, like peer evaluation, that involve shifts in traditional authority and influence patterns among school professionals have actually been instituted (Malen, Ogawa, and Kranz, 1991). Murphy (1990) points to the possibility that sharing of authority may be more widespread than the scholarly literature indicates. He suggests that it would be useful for researchers to investigate possible ways in which "authority and influence can be shared" (p. 45).

Peer Evaluation and Coaching

Another aspect of the peer evaluation question involves the actual benefits that accrue to teachers and their students in improved teaching. In our case, is peer evaluation qualitatively different from evaluation done by administrators in terms of its impact on teaching practice? Joyce and Showers (1982) have long argued for a technical support system among teachers called "coaching." Intended to be implemented only in conjunction with the study and implementation of new teaching methods, coaching involves mutual observation and feedback among pairs, or teams of teachers. Such teaming would ideally take place on a school–wide basis and provide interpersonal support and companionship as well as technical feedback during the process of adopting new methods of teaching.

Garmston (1987) further divides coaching practices into "technical" and "collegial" coaching. He argues that "certain technical coaching practices tend to inhibit collegiality and professional dialogue" by causing coaches to take on an "evaluative function" (p. 19). In contrast, "suspension of judgment in collegial coaching helps teachers to establish open professional interchange more quickly" (p. 20). The latter method, he claims, leads more

directly to the goal of collegiality among teachers, and, in turn, to deeper and more long–term reflection on their work.

The Peer Evaluation Program in Dade County

In conjunction with the second wave of educational reforms, Dade County, with the support of legislative action and the state department of education, attracted the eyes of districts around the nation in the middle 1980s with its school–based management and professionalization of teaching programs. Thirty–three of the almost three hundred schools became pilot school–based management schools in 1987. In order to be accepted into the program, school staff proposed a variety of innovations of their own selection. Nine of the pilot schools proposed some form of peer evaluation. Eight of these schools implemented their peer evaluation plan in 1987 and another elementary school began its program in 1988. In implementing peer evaluation, these schools embarked on new working relationships among teachers and between teachers and administrators.

Definition

Peer evaluation unfolded in Dade County as a joint venture of union and management. Both parties agreed upon a special waiver of contract stipulations and district policy which school–based management schools could request in order to proceed with the program.

The normal evaluation procedure requires that building administrators conduct classroom observations of each teacher annually. Newer, untenured teachers must be observed two to four times a year, depending on the number of years they have taught. The results of these formal observations become part of the teacher's permanent file and are a primary factor in their evaluation at the end of the year.

The waiver allowed these formal observations to be conducted by teachers trained in the Teacher Assessment and Development System (TADS) observation process. It specified that each teacher to be trained must have acceptable evaluations for at least three consecutive years and not currently be on prescription. It specified that at least half of the required observations of untenured teachers be conducted by an administrator, and it reserved the task of final evaluation for the administrator. It specified a unique role for the teacher as observer, that of a support and resource to the teacher being observed. This became the primary role if the teacher observed is found sufficiently lacking in competencies to be put on prescription. In such a case, the administrator must conduct future formal observations and the teacher who observed initially acts as a mentor to the teacher.

The waiver also outlined procedures to be followed if a school staff should opt to implement only unofficial observation among teachers using the TADS instrument. In such cases, the completed observation form should be given to the observed teacher and no copies are to be made. The peer observer meets with the observed teacher to talk over what was learned from the observation.

Models Implemented

Most schools took the standard approach to the peer evaluation outlined in the waiver. Training in TADS, the teacher evaluation system adopted by the district, was opened to teachers. School staff designated certain teachers (through some combination of self–selection, appointment by administration, and election by colleagues) to receive training. Most teachers selected and trained to carry out observations were lead teachers, department heads, or other respected teachers. Their primary responsibility in teacher evaluation was conducting formal observations and conferring with the observed teachers about what they had seen. In all cases, teachers indicated their willingness to be observed by a peer either by signing up as individuals or agreeing to the procedure as a group. Principals generally facilitated the scheduling of observations through some kind of flexible staffing arrangement such as lead teachers, academic teams, regular substitute teachers, or use of aides.

Variation in the General Pattern

A few schools developed different approaches to implementing formal evaluation, ranging from a few teachers taking over the task almost entirely to extensive involvement of many teachers.

Although most school implementations reflected the fact that teachers could only be expected to add a small proportion of the required observations to their regular duties, at one small elementary school teachers virtually replaced administrators in the observation role. A teacher who was interested in becoming an administrator and the counselor carried out about ninety percent of the formal observations.

More than one school's proposal for peer evaluation indicated that the overall quantity of teacher observation would increase. In practice, however, most schools continued to adhere to the required number of annual observations. Only one middle school routinely conducted about fifty percent more formal observations than required, a practice which the principal had carried out even before teachers participated in observation.

In quite a different approach, which might be called "formalized egalitarianism," an elementary school implemented a peer evaluation program that involved teachers training teachers. Under this program all teachers could observe as well as be observed. Teachers elected four colleagues to be formally trained in peer observation. But these trained teachers, or leaders, carried out observations with a team of one to three other teachers with whom they shared ideas regarding method and focus of observation in pre– and post–observation sessions. Thus, teachers received practical training through work with trained observation team leaders.

Furthermore, the observation process was both voluntary and official. Teachers volunteered to join the group that would both observe peers and be observed by them. (No one could be an observer without also agreeing to be observed.) Teachers selected

the individuals they wished to observe them (including one trained leader), scheduled the time, and specified the aspect of their teaching they wanted observed. After receiving feedback from their observation team, teachers could elect to use the observation as their official one or request another observation from a team or an administrator. This peer evaluation model spread knowledge of teaching competencies throughout the staff and, at the same time, fulfilled an official purpose. As a result, teachers found time to participate. As in other programs, only official observations were recorded, but some teachers took part in more observations because of the benefits they derived from them.

Informal Peer Observation Models

Two elementary schools instituted models of peer evaluation designed to provide less threatening interaction among peers than formal observation.

At one school, teachers interacted with their peers in what was called a "peer assistance" program. Trained teachers were available to observe and coach teachers who requested the aid or who were referred by administrators. The trained teachers also provided workshops in teaching techniques to the staff as a whole. At some other schools, in addition to the peer evaluation program, trained teachers supported the professional growth of beginning teachers and others by carrying out observations that were used in coaching but were not formally recorded. But this formal mentoring was the only aspect implemented at this school.

At another school, all teachers were encouraged to participate in training to be observers in a model which could be called "informal egalitarianism." Trained teachers then paired up and observed each other, meeting later to discuss what they saw. The staff called this model, which involved voluntary participation of pairs of teachers "peer observation." With its goal of school–wide training in classroom observation and mutual observation and feedback, this model exemplified collegial coaching. However, training opportunities were limited to a few teachers annually from each school, so this school's program could only grow at a very slow pace. It also appeared that, even among teachers that were trained, the personal satisfaction derived from observing colleagues voluntarily was not sufficient to draw them away very often from the other demands on their time. They didn't carry out as many mutual observations as they had intended.

Growth of Peer Evaluation

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the growth in proportion of staff affected by peer evaluation over the three pilot years of school–based management (1987–88 through 1989–90). School staff that implemented formal observations experienced the most steady growth in proportion of teachers affected by peer evaluation.

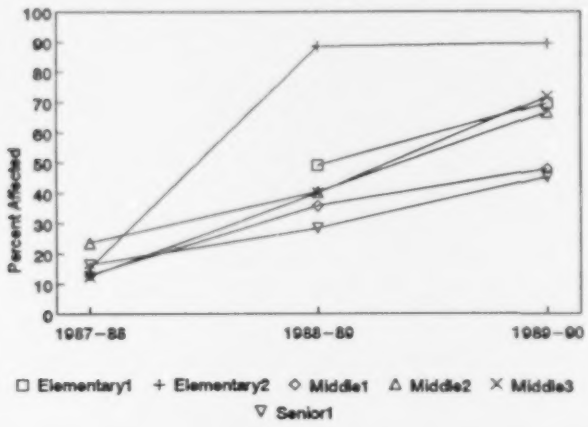

Figure 1: Staff Affected at Schools with Official Observations

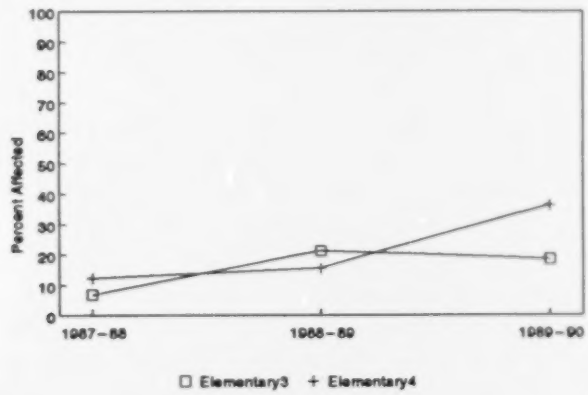

Figure 2: Staff Affected at Schools with Informal Observations

Year One (1987–88): Training

Training occurred toward the end of the first year of the program (1987–88) and, at most schools, only those teachers who received training were affected by the program. In both schools with official observations (Figure 1) and schools with informal observations (Figure 2), less than 25% of staff were affected.

Year Two (1988–89): Professionalism in Earnest

During 1988–89, trained teachers began carrying out observations at schools where observations were official. At each of these schools at least twenty–five percent of

teachers were affected by the program, either by observing or being observed officially (Figure 1). Training continued and new teachers were added to the corps of available observers.

Additional training was also available for teachers at schools implementing informal observations. Elementary school 3, which adopted the informal egalitarian model, took advantage of the additional training (Figure 2).

At most schools, there was a desire to let more teachers be trained and let more teachers be observed, by permitting teachers to observe outside of their field, for example. For most school staff, the paucity of openings for training was a source of frustration. The district supported this program by providing training for teachers, but only after all administrators had received training. Thus, each school was limited to about 2 to 5 teachers being trained per year.

Year Three (1989–90): Implementation Becomes Routine

At schools with official observations, the program was clearly in full swing by the third year. More teachers were observed for the first time, causing the cumulative proportion of teachers that had been affected over the three years of the pilot to increase to forty percent or more. The proportion of observations carried out by teachers at most of these schools stabilized at about thirty to forty percent annually. New observers continued to be trained.

On the other hand, schools with informal observations experienced much less growth in teacher involvement. In Figure 2, proportion of teachers involved leveled off with no new teachers trained at elementary school 3 where the informal egalitarian model had been adopted. A few more teachers were affected at elementary school 4 where the program had only been designed for teachers clearly needing assistance and not for the faculty in general.

Unique Patterns of Growth

At elementary school 2 about ninety percent of teachers were affected in both the second and third year of implementation. This was the school where the trained teachers virtually took over the administrative task of observation.

Elementary school 1 in Figure 1, is the school that adopted the "formalized egalitarian" model. Beginning their program in 1988–89, the school immediately evidenced patterns of involvement similar to the other schools with formal observations. One difference that is not evident in the graph is that teachers were carrying out about seventy percent of the school's observations by 1989–90, since most teachers who had experienced peer evaluation opted to be involved in it again the next year.

One middle school does not appear in the graph because they temporarily suspended the

program in 1988–89. Some of their teachers were trained in 1987–88, but they did not begin observing until 1989–90. In that year the proportion of teachers affected was similar to that of other schools with official observations.

Impact of Peer Evaluation

An estimate of the impact of peer evaluation was measured by looking at three factors: staff attitude toward the program, rapport among teachers (an aspect of school climate), and student achievement. Findings were positive, although extremely tentative, given the small number of schools and the nature of their self–selection.

Staff Attitude

Most teachers liked the peer evaluation program, whether asked about satisfaction with observation by peers or about their own professional growth. Some teachers felt more comfortable being observed by a peer. In addition, some felt that teachers provide more careful critique of teaching methods and content than administrators, who focus more on classroom management. However, others judged administrator observations to be as valuable as or better than those done by teachers. Observers were particularly excited about how much they were learning about their own teaching as a result of the process of observing others.

Rapport Among Teachers

School climate was measured by the Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire. Rapport among teachers was generally higher in schools that adopted peer evaluation than in other schools, but not in all cases. Other factors undoubtedly entered in. For example, two schools in which rapport was low had obvious reasons for such a phenomenon. One is an exceptional education center and, as such, may have less contact between different segments of the staff. The other school's staff was about to be split off into two other new schools and the impending changes were a concern to teachers.

Achievement Among Students

Impact on student achievement was mixed, with elementary schools showing improvement relative to other Dade County schools and middle schools maintaining their relative position. It would be difficult to attribute any improvement to the peer evaluation program alone, but the adoption of this particular innovation may be related to an interest in achievement among staff that would affect students in many ways.

Continuation of Peer Evaluation

The peer evaluation program has continued to exist through the 1991–92 school year at each of the schools where formal observation is practiced. Small groups of teachers from

each school continue to be trained in order to maintain the cadre of trained teachers. Observation by peers has been integrated into the rouune of the teacher evaluation process five years after its initial debut.

In contrast, in the two schools with unofficial observation procedures, the program has ceased to exist. Occasional mentoring of new teachers takes place at the peer assistance school, but the program is no longer a school–wide resource. At the peer observation (informal egalitarian) school, teachers are still encouraged to observe each other, but they do not use the TADS observation instrument.

Conclusions

There are two important conclusions relevant to the implementation of peer evaluation in Dade County schools. The first has to do with the program's relation to the ideals of peer coaching as defined in the literature. The second has to do with the program's longevity in a context of declining support.

Comparison to Ideals of Coaching

"Peer evaluation" is the appropriate name for this program as it was implemented in Dade County. Although some observers may have acted more like technical or collegial coaches than others, the same can be said of some administrators. Some observers worked quite patiently with teachers, providing them with extensive commentary on their performance and observing more than one time before turning in the formal observation. Nevertheless, in only two of the schools (both elementary) was mutual observation, a key aspect of peer coaching, integral to the program. One of these, which included fulfilling the formal observation requirement and did not require training of all teachers, has persisted successfully into 1991–92. The other program, which could be described as "collegial coaching," has not persisted. While teachers are still encouraged to observe each other at that school, the TADS observation instrument is not used.

Continuation

The peer evaluation program has continued two years beyond the initial three–year pilot. This has been true despite declining district–level support for the larger school–based management concept under which the program was initiated. The central office administration has undergone two major changes since the school–based management years, and the downtown school–based management office declined and disappeared over the years of transition. Issues of more immediate practical import, such as budget and school construction, have become much more prominent. Nevertheless, teachers at schools committed to the program continue to receive training, albeit only after all district administrators have been served. Even though most principals wanted more widespread training of teachers, The rate of training seems to have sufficed for the perpetuation of the formal program.

It may be that the peer evaluation role survived when those described by Smylie & Denny did not, because this new teacher role was quite narrowly defined. More broadly defined teacher roles may not fare so well. Also, the role was not a new one. Teachers had been observed by administrators using this method for a number of years. The transition to teachers taking on that administrative role, especially if those teachers already had some legitimate authority, like department chair, or, simply, "experienced teacher," may not have involved much of a transition.

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